



This week we continued our series in Mark's gospel, reaching Jesus' well-known and challenging teaching on marriage and divorce in Mark 10v1-12 – a no less challenging topic today than it was in Jesus' time.

We began by considering the background to this conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees, noting that this was a “test” not a genuine question, v2. We saw that it had both a political and religious context that made it a pertinent question by which the Pharisees could trap Jesus, and we also noted what a limited and poor question it was: “Is it OK to...?”, “Are we allowed to...?”, rather than “What is best?”. We observed that we can often come to God with a similar attitude.

We saw how Jesus revealed that what Moses had offered (the permission to divorce – Deuteronomy 24v1-4) as a concession and protection for vulnerable rejected women, the Pharisees had made into a licence to sin. This was because their “hearts were hard” Jesus declared in v5.

We noted that Jesus took this question about divorce and turned it on its head, by instead showing **God's good picture of marriage**, v6-9.

There are many things we could draw out of Jesus' teaching here. We touched briefly on a few of the principles for marriage:

- God created gender (v6)
- marriage matters (v7)
- marriage is for one man and one woman (v7)

But we spent the longest where Jesus spent the longest: on the nature and basis of marriage. Its nature is that it is an extraordinary union (note the number of references to being united/joined together/made one in v7-9). Its basis is that it

is a work of God. Marriage is a creation by God – see v9. It is not merely a human decision; God acts to make something new when a couple marry.

But, great as marriage may be, why is it so significant?

Marriage points us to the relationship between Christ and the church (see Revelation 21v2 and Ephesians 5v25). Marriage is so important (both in its strength and its longevity) because it points us to Christ's love for the church, God's love for us (which is stronger and longer lasting than we could possibly imagine!). And marriage also shows us something of the very nature of God himself – a trinity; a Father, Son and Spirit eternally loving and relating to each other. A cosmic dance, C. S. Lewis called it, which we are invited to join.

We concluded with two points of application:

- **marriage is important, so treasure it**
- **marriage is broken, so come to God in grace through and despite it**

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group...

1. How does our society view and define long-term relationships? Is there anything we would agree/celebrate in it? Where would we differ, and why?
2. What impression do we get of the similarities between marriage and divorce in Jesus' days and ours?
3. How does Jesus define marriage? How does the 'big picture' view we get from here and other biblical teachings on marriage change our perspective on it?
4. What does the Bible say about singleness? In light of the importance of marriage, how we can protect and value singleness and single people in church?
5. How can we treasure marriage as a church – both those of us who are married and those of us who are single?
6. How can/must we come to God in grace through and despite marriage – both those of us who are married and those of us who are single?
7. In what ways do we go to Jesus asking “what are we allowed?” rather than “what is best?”. Specifically in relationships/marriage? More generally?